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ABSTRACT

This report presents a review of research on group discussion as used in adult education within the context of the nature of man and in relation to his ultimate end of self-realization. The review considers (1) those factors involved in group discussion; (2) its broad purposes, for example, mutual education, affecting self-concept, and attitudes and interpersonal change; and (3) approaches to it, for example, the leadership role, nonmanipulative approaches, and human relations and sensitivity training. Discussion is also examined in the service of institutions--parent education, religious education, education for aging, and public affairs discussion. Discussion and the mass media are reviewed, that is, international uses, community education, and a recent scientific approach. Such pitfalls to be avoided as mechanistic values, educational chauvinism, intellectual elitism, and the tyranny of numbers are analyzed. The final chapter deals with the "Precipice of Infinity" in which the following topics are discussed: affective and intellectual self-actualization, and ideal discussion groups, and whether life itself is at stake. (Author)

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TOWARD GOG AND MAGOG OR?: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE OF ADULT GROUP DISCUSSION

FRANKLIN W. W. OTANEKI
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COLLEEN McCARTER

Syracuse University
PUBLICATIONS IN CONTINUING EDUCATION
and
ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON ADULT EDUCATION

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A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

OF ADULT GROUP DISCUSSION

by

FRANKLIN W. W. OSINSKI

JOHN OHLIGER

and

COLLEEN MC CARTHY

"Gog and Magog. In Biblical prophecy, the heathen nations to be led by Satan in a war against the Kingdom of God. Revelation 20: 7-8." quoted from The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language. New York: American Heritage Publishing Co., 1969. See also Ezekiel 38-39.

August, 1972

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ABSTRACT

A review is made of research on group discussion as used in adult education within the context of the nature of man and in relation to his ultimate end of self-realization. It considers factors involved in group discussion; its broad purposes, such as mutual education, affecting self-concept, and attitudes and interpersonal change; and approaches to it--the role of leadership, non-manipulative approaches, and human relations and sensitivity training. It then examines discussion in the service of institutions--parent education, religious education, education for aging, and public affairs discussion. It reviews discussion and the mass media--international uses, community education, and a recent scientific approach. After analyzing pitfalls to avoid, such as mechanistic values, educational chauvinism, intellectual elitism, and the tyranny of numbers, it concludes with consideration of the "Precipice of Infinity"--affective and intellectual self-actualization, an ideal discussion group? and "Is Life Itself at Stake"?

FOREWORD

Group discussion has been almost universally accepted as an effective technique in adult education. The extensive literature on this subject speaks of its importance from the adult educators' viewpoint. Even a cursory examination of the literature will reveal the many-faceted opinions on the use and application of group discussion.

The vast amount of documents with discussion in adult education which passes through the ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult Education needed some kind of sifting and sorting to bring about some organized sense out of the various approaches suggested by writers on this subject.

The authors have given us a review of what they considered to be the relevant selected literature. It ought to be clearly apparent to the reader that the authors have not included all of the literature dealing with adult group discussion; to do so would have been a more ambitious undertaking than present resources permitted. Besides, one questions what additional usefulness, other than exhaustiveness, such an exhaustive search would have served. The fact is that the authors have included most of the more important and significant literature, which literature is sufficient and adequate to indicate what adult educators really want to know about adult group discussion.

But the authors have given us something more than a review of the literature, and here is the real strength of their monograph. They have presented their review within the context of man's humanness and his dignity, that is, his integrity as person. This point must not be allowed to be lost in the maze of claims that discussion is a "pure" form of learning without any manipulation. As good and useful as group discussion may be, there are inherent problems associated with its use, some of which the authors have indicated.

The three collaborators on this literature review were: Franklin Osinski, member of the Literature-Poetry Advisory Panel of the Ohio Arts Council and one time junior high school teacher;

John Ohliger, associate professor of adult education at the Ohio State University, and author of numerous books, monographs, and reviews; and Colleen McCarthy, an experienced social worker and returned Peace Corps Volunteer, currently pursuing a program of lifelong self-education.

Our thanks to the authors for the tremendous amount of time they spent in preparing this review; the knowledge that they have performed a highly useful task for adult educators ought to be deeply satisfying to them.

Stanley M. Grabowski
Director,
ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult Education

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I am man, not a machine
I wish to know, to create
Not sit and wait, with vacuous being
For the guiding hand, writ on the wall
Telling me Be this or that, know this fact or that.
I am Man on the journey to the Future.

The reader might question what these words have to do with a review of the literature of adult group discussion. Our answer is this monograph, what it propounds, the vision of humanity that it seeks to conceptualize--the particular reality within which the educator, researcher, or student operates.

To say that we are in a period of turmoil, change, reform, confrontation, or revolution is a truism. Apocalyptic talk, whether on a global, national, or institutional scale, misses the basic question: What are we?

It is our belief that the question of what we are should constitute the foundation of all writings truly designed for "adult education." We find that this question has been lost in much of the literature of the field, including discussion literature. The question is frequently treated at the levels of hidden assumption or cliche. At these levels the discussion of literature generally serves the function of encouraging the growth of institutional control by the few over the many. We are firm in our belief that research now should turn toward a reexamination of the question of the nature of man (we use the term "man" to include men and women) separate from the influence and control of environment. Though we reiterate that apocalyptic talk misses the basic question, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion, judged by present trends, that we are approaching a fundamental struggle over which view of man will prevail.

Houle, in his latest book (172) writes: "Any effort to build a system of educational process on the work of a specific goal, method of

practice, or institution is limited. For example, the attempt to make universal generalizations on the basis of community development, group discussion, or the procedures of an evening school are repudiated by many educators of adults because those generalizations do not conform to the reality they experience." Houle observes in his book that such attempts to formulate principles were prevalent in earlier years in American adult education. His observation helps to explain the relative paucity of generalized discussion literature in recent years.

Discussion is not a panacea for social or educational ills. All solutions presented as panaceas are illusory, but though convenient answers are not at hand, those who raise questions must attempt answers, as we do here. What follows reflects the firmness of our beliefs. It also indicates confusion, ambivalence, and occasional disagreements among ourselves and our editors. At this moment in history it is difficult to see how such a document could do otherwise. We are calling for a change in direction at the same time that we are in the midst of change. We seek to accomplish the virtually impossible but absolutely necessary task of constructing a base for our thoughts--a foundation that is firm, yet not imprisoning.

Shortcomings in the Literature

Within the above context we are willing to make value judgments about the literature under review. At one end of the continuum, the best literature addresses itself to what we conceive as the true nature and purpose of discussion; going down the scale, we rate much that is not so much obsolete as merely trivial; that avoids, or is irrelevant to, those fundamental social issues which grow more pressing with the passage of time. At the worst, too many researchers are burdening our libraries with mounds of tiresome materials on more factors to be quantified and categorized, minutiae of data that add nothing to our wisdom.

The discussion literature is laden with a number of shortcomings indicating a mental mode and

approach that frustrates personal growth. Many discussion writers who reflect mechanistic values exacerbate the social ills that afflict us. Discussion is seen as another social engineering tool to "guide" people toward some pre-determined goal in the social machine.

The discussion researcher, in attempting to ascertain the most amenable discussion mode for achieving his goals, too often runs the serious risk of becoming a manipulator of human factors. He recognizes "person" but not the integrity of the person. A job is to be done, and it will be done.

Researchers are so bound to their own theories and self-imposed academic limitations that often the reality of the situations before them gives way to pure fantasy speculations. Educational chauvinism, intellectual elitism, and paternalistic attitudes are symptoms of this self-delusion. Often researchers put themselves in the position of demonstrating self-evident observations--that "a=b" and thus "a+b = a+b."

Part of the problem of redundant research is the failure to question underlying assumptions. Too often researchers start with a number of assumptions and proceed with a research methodology that may or may not disprove the assumptions. Factors to which the researcher may be oblivious because of the mental space he moves in, will vitiate any basic suppositions and make the researcher's work essentially an exercise in semantics. Words are very often a poor reflection of the reality being dealt with. Numbers are sometimes a better descriptive tool, but because of the absolute image of numbers, researchers may permit themselves to be ruled by them without questioning the underlying assumptions of mathematical structures. We must redirect ourselves to dealing with real people, not mechanically constructed images of people.

The Nature of Discussion

It is typical to begin works such as this with a definition--in this case a definition of discussion. But we find most such definitions

static, arbitrary, containing too heavy a baggage of "hidden agendas," often trivial, and sometimes within the realm of fantasy. Instead of offering a definition here, we could posit a view that discussion in the ideal sense is a reflection of man's innate desire to interact with others. We prefer to note with Freire that education (of which discussion is here considered a part) is never neutral.

This is Freire's attempt to clarify what he means by "the impossibility of a neutral education" (173):

> First of all, it no more depends on my point of view than on anyone else's wish. To say that education cannot be a neutral action is to state a concrete fact, the critical perception of which is an essential part of my attitude with regard to the educational process.
>
> However, this critical perception does not define education as a practice in which educators fail to respect not only the expressivity of the educatees but also their right to <u>choose</u> and their right to learn how to choose by the practical method of choosing.
>
> Education cannot be neutral because it is always an action either for the 'domestication' of men or for their liberation. While in the former sense it is solely a domesticating practice, in the latter sense it is a procedure in which the educators invite the educatees to know, and to 'unveil the world' in a critical manner.
>
> In the domesticating practice there must be a dichotomy between those who manipulate and those who are manipulated. In the liberating practice, one does not find subjects who liberate, and objects which are liberated. There is thus no dichotomy.
>
> While the former process is prescriptive, the latter is dialogical.

Thus there is no such thing as discussion neutrally defined. Though discussion can be seen as a "tool," as some authors do, tools are not necessarily neutral. A rifle is a tool that can be used to kill game for food or kill people, but it is never usable for helping people toward personal growth. And when one rifle is multiplied into millions or into atomic weapons it even loses some or all of its character as a "tool." Some would say that it then begins to take on a life of its own.

Factors Involved in Group Discussion

External factors are crucial in determining the context of discussion. Note the paradox: on the one hand, we have the small primary group meeting for face-to-face exchange. But its sponsor might be some institution, an organization removed from primary contact to the extent that it increases in size, remoteness, and impersonality. Yet almost all the literature refers to groups that are organized and/or led by institutional representatives.

The issue of directive versus non-directive discussion becomes moot in this context. Even where so-called non-directive techniques are used, certain goals are sought by agents who brought the group into being or who attempt to service an already existing group. A discussion under such auspices, when parameters are not freely chosen by the individual participants, is one carried out in an atmosphere of manipulation.

It is only fair to add that sponsorship of discussion groups is one means by which some institutions seek to humanize their operations. Improved communications and feedback achieved through discussion might render institutions less rigid if they honestly seek to be more responsive to their clientele, but only if the institutions, at the same time, seek to limit tendencies to gigantic growth.

Voluntarism in association can be correlated with increased freedom for the individuals

involved. Great Books and Great Decisions groups meet voluntarily, but with resource material that is institutionally selected. Those who come together in private clubs associate voluntarily, but within a framework of social pressures and taboos. Structure in their discussion format may range from nearly total spontaneity to the use of "guidelines" and other resources developed by professionals.

CHAPTER II

SOME BROAD PURPOSES OF DISCUSSION

Discussion as a "Tool" for Growth

The general literature on discussion is of value in acquainting a beginner with guidelines and uses of discussion. Here discussion is seen as a "tool." But discussion theorists rarely mention the value structure that is the basis for discussion initiation, or consider the ultimate psychological and varied consequences of their methods. For a writer to simply say that discussion affects personal change and attitude formation is avoidance of end results. The person who experiences the awesome power of an earthquake may never see the utter devastation thousands of miles away caused by a tide set off by that earthquake.

Paterson has written a treatise on "The Concept of Discussion: A Philosophical Approach" (118). He asks questions and faces certain realities almost none of the other writers do. Many of his statements fly in the face of accepted beliefs about discussion (118):

> Even if there were objective criteria by reference to which we could clearly measure the degree to which assimilation of material, grasp of principle, or mastery of skill had resulted . . . I should still doubt whether such unquestioned benefits were the true touchstone against which to assess the value of class discussion. . . .
>
> In terms of the conscious intentions of the participants, the educational benefits above-mentioned must, like any social or psychological benefits resulting from the discussion, be viewed as by-products--genuinely educational by-products indeed, but still

by-products, not the realization of the true significance of the discussion.

> If educational discussion is to be a genuinely 'dialectical' activity in a completely free and open setting, it would seem to follow that any attempt to predetermine the course of a given class discussion must be mistaken. True discussion cannot be directed, or even guided, for to attempt to do so is, in effect, to opt out of the discussion, to close one's consciousness to alternative interpretations of the phenomena under discussion before these alternatives have even been stated. . . .
>
> One inevitably wonders how many counterfeit discussions are staged in adult classes.

Contrast Paterson with Schwab (134), Eros and Education, who states that "discussion is in one sense only a systematization, a conscious and controlled development of what every good teacher tends to do." Thus Schwab says that stimulative discussion constitutes a sin of pride, is a privation of possible and desirable ends, and becomes positively miseducative.

For Schwab and many such as he, people grow only to accept and appreciate the given present and past. The future is not an extension of the present, but a separate reality that grows from the present. We are the Present and we are the Future! To live only in the past, or to act only in the present is to diminish the full expression of our being. Discussion should not be perverted to serve a method or a system that is blind to the Future.

Bormann (171), in his textbook Discussion and Group Method, devotes a chapter to ethical problems of discussion, and for this reason his textbook is more worthwhile than the others. Bormann recognizes the many impediments that can and usually do exist as barriers to transcendence of self.

For typical treatment of discussion methods in general one can briefly look at works by Hill (67), Eyestone (41), Leadership Pamphlets (71), Utterback (151), Beckhard (13), Menkin (101,102), and Gutzmer (58).

Mutual Education and Growth

In reviewing the literature on group discussion, we found too few sources that represent an attitude which values discussion insofar as it leads toward freedom and growth.

In Leading Group Discussion (25), a Syracuse University publication, Harry Miller and Barbara Berger found the beginnings (1955) of discussion "which involves growth in understanding and enjoyment of the self and the complex world about the self." Miller and Berger observed a movement toward monopoly of opinion control and manipulation, and also noted that education "generally, prepares people for the more practical tasks of life . . . but the life span and the period of economic usefulness no longer coincide." Thus, the development and nurturing of inner resources become all the more important in order to deal with outside manipulation of one's mind and economic being.

Houle (70), in an address, "The Uncommon School," delivered at Syracuse University, spoke of the central concerns of Henry Thoreau: the proper relationship of man to another in coming to know himself and his own potentialities. Thoreau founded a Lyceum, an adult education association wherein men could meet together to educate each other. It would behoove us as educators and nation builders to reexamine such historical traditions.

Bloomberg (19) describes an experiment in community development that focused on the intrinsic value of each person. Individual growth and change were effected within a pattern of authentic experiences common to all. A number of discussion theorists talk about the excitement of watching the dynamics of interpersonal relationships as they

psychologically grow, but this observing is more of an entertaining sideshow to the discussion goal.

Barnlund and Haiman (11), in The Dynamics of Discussion, write about a highly non-directed discussion in which subject matter is of secondary importance. Relationships, feeling, mutual understanding, and acceptance are paramount. "The way for a student to feel as well as understand growth process is to participate in the birth and early growing pains of a new group which has no superstructure imposed upon it from without."

Gordon (55), in Group-Centered Leadership: A Way of Releasing the Creative Power of Groups, propounds the view that the initiator function should be gradually assumed by the group until there is no longer a leader. The group then becomes increasingly self-directing, determining its own objectives and directing its own activities to meet those self-determined goals. This type of discussion seems to be a good way to provide an uninitiated growth group with some means of orienting themselves before taking matters into their own hands. Gordon believes that the greatest amount of creative power is released by a group that is left to itself.

Wieting (155) reports in "When Neighbors Meet" about a practical setup in Ohio under the aegis of the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation. The only connection between the discussion participants and the Ohio Farm Bureau is through the published Advisory Council Guide for the monthly discussion. A minimum of structure exists, with the discussion resembling what occurs anytime friends get together and talk about common subjects of concern. An elected secretary reports the essence of the discussion to the Farm Bureau office in the state capitol. His feedback from the grassroots level serves as one of the bases for government decisions. Topics for discussion are not limited solely to farm concerns but range over issues of national and international interest. A problem with this setup is that one is dealing with a generally homogenous group--the conservative Ohio farmer. The range of human contact is limited here, yet parochialism is a very possible problem with any neighborhood type of discussion.

One of the better ways for individuals to learn from one another is by exchanging personal experiences and insights. A work edited by Hunter (74), When Tomorrow Becomes Today, reports the results of a discussion program on retirement preparation in terms of retired persons' stories about how they felt and what they did in particular life situations. Participants talked about their emotional, financial, and health problems. Discussion proceedings simply carried over from the normal life pattern of communication. By relating to someone else's problems, participants were able to gain insights into their own. They simply needed encouragement to converse without any pressures.

Extant are a number of studies of various efforts of institutional structures deliberately fostering programs with emphasis placed on the intangible aspects of human growth. Solomon (141) describes a project to effect growth within vocational rehabilitation groups. Solomon's desired goal for his groups was to experience more fully awareness in various aspects related to self. Among the signs indicative that personal growth did take place were subjects becoming more genuine, personal risk-taking, and sensitivity to others. The basic problem with Solomon's approach is his belief in the efficacy of professionally programmed materials for growth sessions.

Malamud (95) has a worthwhile report on Teaching A Human Relations Workshop. Whereas Solomon believes in employing program materials throughout all sessions as a focal point, Malamud uses audio-visual materials only as a starter to elicit reaction from participants. Malamud's experience at first was frustrating. People expected to be spoon-fed human relations as just so many psychological facts. Much difficulty was encountered in attempting to motivate discussants to discover their own insights and absorb those insights in a personal emotional way. These problems are understandable in light of the social phenomenon we will observe repeatedly (the raising of personal expectations as a result of the institutional value structures inculcated into people from the time of first exposure to those values).

Psychologist Carl Rogers (124,130) has long been keenly interested in the possibilities of man expanding his being through a process of interpersonal growth. In his book on encounter groups Rogers advances the real possibilities of the encounter group as an instrument of change. How people and organizations change is a salient concern of Rogers; the encounter group is seen as facilitating change by creating an awareness through group dynamics of feelings about change and its constructive possibilities. Rogers concludes that (129):

> Those who may have thought of the encounter group as a fad or phenomenon affecting only a few people temporarily would do well to reconsider. In the troubled future that lies ahead of us, the trend toward intensive group experience is related to deep and significant issues having to do with change. These changes may occur in persons, in institutions, in our urban and cultural alienation, in racial tension, in our national frictions, in our philosophies, our values, our image of man himself. It is a profoundly significant movement, and the course of its future will, for better or for worse, have a profound impact on all of us.

Rogers' view of encounter groups is quite distinct from the dime-store psychodrama or psychotherapy versions that have proliferated around the country.

Affecting Self-Concept

The initial movement toward acceptance of constant growth and change involves a solid basis in attitudes of self. A number of discussion researchers and workers have noted the importance of attitudinal structures concerning self when realizing any true success within discussion which emphasizes interrelation on a personal basis. Imbler (78) has done a thesis concerned with the negative and positive factors affecting self-concept. Small group discussion under a supportive and secure atmosphere was used as a means of

enhancing self-concept by training discussants to work as a learning team, thus breaking down the defense mechanism of closed-mindedness that inhibits learning and creates unsatisfactory interpersonal relations. The thesis bore out the conclusion of many previous studies that the more closed-minded a person the less positive his self-concept.

Johnson (81) states in a report on "A Human Relations Training Program for Hospital Personnel" that twice as many discussants in the program found they had learned more about themselves than they had expected to. Role problems within jobs became remote when the discussants found that the group experience was unique and exciting because of the ability to self-initiate experiments and because of an atmosphere of privacy in the expression of opinions and feelings. A major reason for this enthusiasm was the manner in which the laboratory discussion method was set up. The discussion group was strictly self-directed, with no member of the training staff present during discussion. Patterns of leadership and participation were developed spontaneously.

We will examine more closely, in the next chapter, business world awareness of the necessity for developing personnel abilities in human relations. Johnson recognizes this phenomenon and wonders why concern for teaching concept and skills in human relations has not progressed widely among the very professions devoted to helping or giving service to people. How can someone help another if he cannot even understand his own self or relate to any self-concept?

Attitudes and Interpersonal Change

Affecting attitudes is a by-product of almost any discussion. However, discussion can be used as a setting allowing change of attitudes growing out of personal interaction. Fleming (46) investigated the problem-centered discussion as a technique for re-orienting the attitudes of the aged. Personal problems were related and discussed by the group, thus facilitating adjustment to their present reality. When attitude changes do occur,

adjustment to, or a wider perspective of, the present reality is what usually has taken place. Too often social conditioning and non-human orientated training blind people to the fact that people change, using and discarding bases of perception as life and the world move on.

Watson (153) has done a synoptic review of the literature--fifty studies--on interpersonal change effected by discussion laboratories in human relations. He concludes that the results most commonly reported were:

1. Increased awareness of self in interaction.
2. Increased accuracy of perception of the feeling and overt behavior of others.
3. Increased openness in interpersonal relationships.
4. Increased acceptance of difference in others.
5. Decrease in extreme interpersonal need orientations, in the areas of control, inclusion and affection.
6. Increased understanding of group behavior, and skill as an effective, flexible group leader, or interdependent group member.
7. Increased self-confidence in interaction.

As is evident from the analysis thus far, more exists in discussion than simply the communication of ideas or thoughts. Correctness of communicated ideas has little correlation with correctness of living or with people interacting with each other in mutually beneficent, constructive relationships. Discussion does not consist merely of ideas or thoughts interrelating. Flesh and blood people are the originators of those ideas and discussion communication theories must center about real people--the whole person. A distinction exists between discussion methods that have the institutionalized concerns of people as their goal and discussion theories which in their structural essence are concerned with real people as they function at their optimum, not with extrapolated, ideational concepts.

Hill (69) has done a Comparative Study of Lecture and Discussion, in which he finds that "as a consequence of social pressure, the more the individual's attitude differs from the norm of his group, the greater the likelihood that the individual will leave the group." Now if discussion deviants gradually drift away from participation, how is any attitudinal change going to take place? Many voluntary attendance discussion programs suffer from this effect. The discussion program becomes dominated by a group norm, a strong conforming pressure. Interpersonal relationships and change become intellectual in nature. People can handle intellectual differences very well and remain the best of associates, neighbors, or friends. Differences in attitudinal structures are not handled easily, primarily because people have not learned how to approach and accept one another on a personal being level. Communication gaps arise that cannot be broached by intellectual interchange.

Parten (162), in a 1967 thesis on "discussion procedures for changing attitudes toward acceptance of self and others," perceives personality and interaction from the point of view of the discussion participant. Parten has moved beyond the position many researchers hold; nevertheless, he still maintains that one could use discussion purposely to change people. From his study he found it doubtful that discussion could affect change in the acceptance of the self and others. The attempt to effect change by the manipulation of the terms of change is like trying to teach a dog to sit by telling him "sit."

Change takes place in the continual assessment of experience and sense data. A discussion participant can expect to experience a constant barrage of intellectual, attitudinal, and emotional patterns. Change will of necessity be slow and gradual until a common denominator of awareness can be achieved among the discussion participants. Ideally, one moment's conclusion is the next moment's starting point. Relevancy becomes relative itself in an open-ended, nondirective discussion. The goal should be growth, a quality intrinsic in one's desire to Be.

CHAPTER III

APPROACHES TO GROUP DISCUSSION

The Role of Leadership

In a chapter, "Discussion Leading and Group Training Theory," in the Industrial Training Handbook, Barber (10) imparts the purpose of a leader with this quote from Kahlil Gibran:

> No man can reveal to you aught but that which already lies asleep in the dawning of your knowledge. If he is indeed wise he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind.

Barber combines the practicalities of management needs with the growth and personality needs of the discussion participant and balances the demands of both parties. He sees as vital discussion of specific roles, responsibilities, and work targets between those in authority and those below who will have to achieve the targets, fulfill the roles, and meet the responsibilities. Barber indirectly challenges the professional's affectation of knowledge by stating that even the most perceptive person in charge of discussion cannot always apprise its undertones with complete accuracy. Good industrial training discussion, he believes, "will stimulate each member of the group to greater perceptiveness and to impartial service."

The role of leadership in discussions centered on the development of interpersonal dynamics is analyzed in several studies. Anderson (41) notes that in intercultural discussion groups Americans rated the effectiveness of a leader by his consideration and his ability in initiation of structure, while those from India were only concerned with a leader's considerate behavior toward discussants. Considerate behavior seemed to be linked more with a non-directive rather than a directive discussion approach.

Flint (47) sees leadership as a function of feedback based on a discussion member's awareness of the extent of his conformity or deviation from the group norm of opinion. Apparently the more "correct" one seems to be, the more likely will one attempt leadership in a group. This is a surreptitious manner of influencing the direction of discussion via leadership and the model of the group norm. Correctness and group viability become values tied to norm structures.

Rowell (133), in his "Theory of Lay Leadership for Adult Study Groups in the Church," emphasizes the leader as an agent of the church paramountly concerned with the personal need of the laity. Church goals are a backdrop to discussion participants interacting with each other in a self-actualizing manner. Again, however, adherence to generally defined goals within an institutional life style leads to a parochialism that must be ultimately limiting in terms of the original person-oriented goals.

Wood and Goldberg (157) researched the "effects of three styles of training upon small group effectiveness" and found that the very presence of a trainer-leader, a perceived status figure, created an authority problem which "inhibited interaction, increased competitiveness and decreased the possibilities for self-disclosure." The study didn't deny that trainer-led discussions were effective, but suggested that removal of trainee dependence may result in better group performance. The trainer then can remain outside the group and spend his time providing feedback material so that the group can self-evaluate its performance and map out its own path of discovery.

A study that bears on such intangibles of group discussion as leadership styles is The Relationship Between Sociability and Rate of Interaction, by Rose (132). Interaction due to personality relationships is as important as any social or external force acting upon the discussion group. Rose's concern is not the discussion method or structure but simply the variation in interaction patterns. Recognizing that different leadership styles affect type and rate of interaction, Rose

rotated leaders between the various experimental groups. Style of communication affected effectiveness of communication and finally the success of any discussion group. The study enters the area of human relationships at its most essential level--the psychological differences that affect personality style and communication.

Non-Manipulative Approaches

Recently, steps have been made to move away from the blatantly manipulative uses of discussion. Batten (12) has a study out: The Non-Directive Approach in Group and Community Work. At least he perceives the need of people to manage their own affairs. By enabling people "to meet more of their own needs by themselves they can increase their status and feeling of self-respect." But the interests of the social or educational agencies are still apparent in Batten's observation that with the non-directive approach agencies can "accomplish more with their limited resources . . ." since ". . . no social or educational agency ever has enough material resources to do all the work it wants to do." Another observation is "that people will generally look after what they provide for themselves more carefully than what an agency provides for them."

The non-directive approach in discussion is one way out of the dilemma of the individual versus the institution. In trying to develop a discussion method that grants more freedom, however, researchers and workers are still constrained by previous modes of perceiving the object of discussion. Batten, who sees the need of freedom from control and manipulation, still asserts that the non-directive worker has to provide both stimulus and structure. He believes that the professional discussion worker is required to "get people thinking and go on with their thinking until they reach some definite conclusion." And structure is important to ensure that the conclusions are practical and relevant to need. If people can't think on their own, it may in large part be due to the modus operandi of the education and social system--the constant force-feeding of knowledge, sense data, and already formulated conclusions.

Paulo Freire, in his Pedagogy of the Oppressed (50): calls this force-feeding the "banking concept of education." Those in power maintain their dominance by "depositing" certain beliefs that the social apparatus forces those dominated to "withdraw" or learn.

> The oppressors use their 'humanitarianism' to preserve a profitable situation. Thus they react almost instinctively against any experiment in education which stimulates the critical faculties. . . . Indeed the interests of the oppressors lie in 'changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them'; for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated. To achieve this end, the oppressors use the banking concept of education in conjunction with a paternalistic social action apparatus. . . .

In the non-directive discussion approach the worker-leader is to employ a structure producing a disciplining effect on the discussion group's efforts to arrive at conclusions. The use of a structure that derives in the head of the worker-leader is a form of consciousness manipulation: imposition of a reality upon the discussion group. If there is to be a structural discipline in the discussion it seems to us that even that should be self-initiated. Any person or group serious in intent and action in their growth and/or learning will eventually perceive the need for structure and discipline and will evolve and formulate their own in keeping with the self-initiated direction.

Blake (18) uses a unique system in his "Structural Communication" that places emphasis on independent judgment encouraged by self-monitoring and inner alertness. The group training exercises were centered on case studies, open forums, structured interactions, and self-monitoring exercises. Discussants saw for themselves how much of a grip conditioning had on their thinking, their approach to problems, and even their manner of listening. An interesting principle on which the program operated was that "nothing of professional

importance can be conveyed to people by instruction." Although the program was structured, no external guidelines existed, a fact that was disturbing to some of the participants--again, conditioning.

Human Relations--Sensitivity Training

According to George K. Gordon (164), "one of the most distinctive educational inventions of the mid-twentieth century is known as 'human relations training' or 'sensitivity training'. . . For practical purposes they [the two terms] have become interchangeable. Regardless of the name, this type of training is an important part of the educational program of many institutions and organizations. . . . Human relations training programs generally share three common characteristics: (1) they are focused on learning about self and relationships with others; (2) the learning is based on the personal experience of the learners themselves as they associate with one another during the training; (3) the learners become collaborative investigators accepting increasing responsibility for directing their own learning."

As Pigors (120,121) has noted in "Operation Springboard," at one time a common over-simplified view was that "human relations problems should be handled by specialists in the personnel department." Presently, various universal business conditions have emphasized the need to consider human resources. Kimball (115) notes that "an individual's personal development plan is of significance to a business in that how he views his progress or lack of it reflects in job performance. Wholesome self-development becomes reflected in increased efficiency and, thus, is of primary interest to business. The discussion study by the Pigors (121) indicates that "management development is one area where personal goals can be harmonized with organizational objectives if programs actually contribute to adult education rather than consisting merely in training for compliance with predetermined policies and procedures."

Golembiewski studied (54) "Confrontation as a Training Design" and found that an exchange of "images" among individuals or organizational units led to favorable attitude changes and to a long-range program attitude change. An awareness of differences among people interacting leads to the maintenance of a flexible position in policy-making and attitude formation. A "Study of the Effectiveness of Sensitivity Training as an Inservice Teacher-Training Program in Human Relations" by Lee (166) indicates that teachers in sensitivity training manifested an increase in self-esteem and that the students of those teachers were absent from class significantly less. Greater awareness of the integrity of another's personhood results in better interrelation among people.

Dice (167) has written on the "Influence of An Educational Awareness Experience," showing that the awareness method can be used as a rationale for planning adult education programs in areas of community and resource development. A concern for integrative changes in personhood is indicated in a thesis by Shay (136) on "Self Concept Changes Among Alcoholic Patients. . . . Resulting from Participation Training in Group Discussion." By being trained in how to relate to each other as persons with common problems, adjustments were made by the patients that produced change apparent even to the subjects themselves.

Peace Corps trainers have seen the need for human relations training via discussion. Trainees have been brought to a state of increasing self-awareness by noting their personal reactions to field situations. The report by Haigh (54) shows how awareness of motives, feeling, and cultural values permits trainees to explore other patterns for handling interpersonal relationships. Development of flexibility, openness, and tolerance to frustration was a goal of a Peace Corps discussion leadership training project reported by Frandsen (49).

Slocum (138), at the University of Washington, did an evaluation study of student T-groups. Students using the T-group method exhibited greater changes in a positive manner

toward sensitivity and self awareness than did control groups following a case study method of learning human relations. Personal experience is far more applicable than duly digested facts.

Another report on application of the T-group method was made by Bolman (20) concerning a university business executive program. Laboratory (i.e., T-group) training affected behavior and self-perception more than the traditional approach of lecture-discussion. Difficulty was encountered in transferring learning from the T-group to other parts of the program because of the use of differing learning models that questioned the validity of the T-group findings. The study could not deny that some change was effected in subsequent on-the-job behavior. The change would probably have been greater if a supportive atmosphere existed throughout the program. It seems inconceivable that a program would include diverse and incompatible learning models, yet this inconsistency which negatively affects the learning process of participants exists in many programs. Within what is essentially traditional drill-fact teaching, educators throw in some personal human contact and call it "character building." The problem of manipulation toward non-self-initiated ends still looms.

T-group sessions have been termed the "thinking man's LSD," and the same abuses noted with LSD can be applied also to T or encounter group sessions. Too often the session is seen as an end in itself. The emotional catharsis of an intensive group experience is sought after as a totally defined experience and as an end in itself. As the Ohio State study noted, people become addicted to the experience.

Toffler (147) makes the observation in Future Shock that people are collecting experiences and are using them as status symbols in the same manner that a previous generation collected material goods; appearances change but the problem remains unrecognized and unchanged. Man today seems to want to avoid any true "encounter" with the being of another human. He reduces himself to the objects of his psychological mechanisms of

avoidance and effectively trades himself off like bubble gum cards assiduously collected to give some meaning to his life. "I'll trade you four nervous breakdowns for one divine ecstasy." We must learn how to touch one another and communicate human being to human being without any pretensions.

We feel that discussion groups oriented toward human relations training may have something to offer, but should not be regarded as a panacea for problems related to a lack of awareness of (or sensitivity to) personhood. Nor should human relations training be seen as a means of ultimately changing institutions. Katz and Kahn (85), in "Organizational Change," warn readers of this major error of confusing individual change with modifications of organizational variables. Discussions on how to change institutions only bring about an awareness of possible need for change but rarely change itself. On the other hand, simply to become more aware of the variables in interpersonal relationships is not enough.

Awareness in itself is useless if not extrapolated into some form of application to daily living. However, if people change as a result of discussion efforts and do not communicate their change and its meaning in relation to the institutional roles they play, a psychological gulf is created separating the individual from his institutions. One of two things usually happens: either the person opts out of the institutional arrangements in his life, or he compromises and accepts the constraint of his being, settling for his little niche in the order of society.

The reader is directed to a book just published for an incisive treatment of this area, Beyond Words: The Story of Sensitivity Training and the Encounter Movement (174). The author, Kurt Back, is a Professor of Sociology and Psychiatry at Duke University. His book presents a concise history, includes interviews with all the major figures (Bradford, Benne, Bennis, etc.), and attempts to place the movement within appropriate social, political, economic, scientific, and (surprise?) religious contexts. Back deals trenchantly with both positive and negative aspects,

explores the difficult question of research validation thoroughly, and does not flinch from expressing his own opinions in an interesting writing style which reveals instead of concealing his own admitted bias toward "hard science."

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION IN THE SERVICE OF INSTITUTIONS

A large body of literature is concerned with research and studies of discussion directed toward some type of community, social, or educational work conducted within an institutional framework. From childhood to old age persons will come into contact with some form of discussion programs within the various institutions they live with and use to somehow order their affairs. Much of this reporting type of discussion literature, unfortunately, is useless to anyone but pedantic researchers in the institutional area actually involved in the program.

The typical institutional-set discussion is conducted with modified directed methods or limiting non-directed methods. In a modified directed method the discussion is specifically guided toward some type of goal that serves the altruistic organizer. In the limiting non-directed discussion, participants are permitted to explore the discussion topics in whatever way desired with a structuring influence being provided by some professional. No matter which way it is expressed, both methods imply consciousness control.

The power group directing the institution has a vested interest in retaining its control. Organized discussion which would lead to self-originating and self-directed growth encounters the hazards imposed by institutional aegis. At Indiana State in 1967, Dollins (35) did a study on the "effect of group discussion as a learning procedure on the adaptive behavior of adult mental retardates." The group discussed topics that were loaded with the implications of control: "Where does the adult learn when he does not go to school"? "How do you act to keep a job"? "Why is discussion fun"? "Does everyone have someone who tells him what to do"? "What does it mean to behave"? "What do we do when we behave"? "Why should we work"? These

questions are of the same type that are discussed in secondary education classes, with the design of setting behavior patterns "acceptable" to those in control.

Solomon, Berzon, and Davis (141), in a 1970 study on a "Personal Growth Program for Self-Directed Groups," face the issue of personal growth and its process within a discussion setting very well. But the whole program took place within the context of adult rehabilitation, with participants garnered from volunteers who showed interest in the self-improvement program to their counselors. If you have trouble getting a job, maybe you need a better self concept. Our institution provides you with the means. Too many professionals believe they hold the key and that people are not capable of initiating their own programs. People come to believe in their own diminished capabilities when institutions keep saying "we are the way" for whatever need you have.

A gulf frequently exists between those who seek to grow in whatever way they choose and the persons who potentially could help them avoid the pitfalls and abuses of the self-initiated learning or growth path chosen. The professional who could personally give of his experience is conditioned by institutions because his subsistence depends on them. Voluntary associations of the type which characterized the adult education movement of the 18th and 19th centuries are impossible under present-day conditions. Yet voluntary associations were once an earmark of Americanism. Discussion set-ups that would be free of manipulation would be of the voluntary association type. Something which once was so uniquely American, however, is today perceived as a radical concept. Illich (77) presently propounds what is essentially voluntary association as an alternative educational form to our present institutional arrangements.

Alker and Kogan find that "discussions along particular topical lines can produce significant increases in individual conservatism. Where normative standards defining appropriate or correct modes of conduct emerge or are reinforced through group discussion, the basis for enhanced

conservatism has been established." When normative standards do not emerge, greater risk-taking manifests itself and there is a greater tolerance for individual idiosyncrasies. Human growth requires risks; human understanding grows from tolerance of the multitude of personalities so different from one's self. Very few institutional discussions of the type we are now reviewing allow and provide for methods of risk taking, of breaking out of habitual patterns.

Parent Education

By far the greatest amount of institutional discussion work, if the literature is an accurate indicator, is done with families, especially mothers and fathers. Since much of life for the majority of people is concerned with child-rearing, family discussion work is only natural. Institutions that understandably offer aid, however, are frequently guilty of fostering dependency. Even private institutions take on a paternalistic quality, partly because of the state laws that govern their activities. If we follow the thread of rationale in many institutional actions, we come up against an establishment of values that either has the force of law or is enforced by the law. Institutions and their programs invariably reflect these established values.

As much as institutional values must be subject to constant scrutiny, the family-community discussions have highlighted the personal aspect of human behavior. Social workers who work in these programs are brought into gut contact with the real problems of real people. In his interesting book, Parents Learn Through Discussion (9), Auerback notes that discussion is as much an emotional experience as an intellectual one. He believes that certain concerns are universal and that a group can be brought to see this. A discussion group begins to realize that the responses of individuals to certain characteristic stages of human development take different forms depending on personality and externals. Auerback makes the novel admission that it is difficult to measure the success of parent education discussion groups because the end

product is the mental health of children and this is measurable only in general terms. In real terms and not in terms of variables, the end product of any discussion is unmeasurable.

"Objective" evaluation of parent education programs entailing discussion is tortuously teased out in many of the reports on these programs. For example, Kraft (87) claims success was determined in a program helping low-income families not according to announced practical goals but according to inferred therapeutic side-effects of participation, such as self-confidence.

Parent education programs have involved specific goals of attitudinal change, with mixed results. Programs of this type invariably involve professional leaders with very definite ideas of what are proper attitudes. See Robinson and Spaights (127), Gamble (53), Heckman (66), and Shapiro (135).

Programs were also devised to aid parent-child communications and to help parents avoid problems in the home as a result of a lack of understanding of their children. Jackson (86), DeRosis (33), Crow (27), and Harding (61) cover several aspects of this approach. Harding's study interestingly notes the enthusiastic response of the participants who took part in a one-week program at a state park. The stimulation of the outdoors and the mutual participation in living activities no doubt contributed to the program's success.

Mills (167), Rabinowitz and Daniels (124), and Endres (39) report on study discussion programs entailing training in child rearing practices. The programs took place under strict institutional and professional control. Rabinowitz and Daniels, in coping with the vagaries of low-income family participation, learned about some cultural factors that were not previously considered.

Alexander (1) has a data-filled evaluation of a family service program in a New York community. The study is self-serving and contains findings that are the common sense, inevitable result of any half-decent program. Members of a study discussion

group were found to significantly increase their knowledge and to use it. This type of evaluation adds nothing to our understanding of discussion. But the program was publicly funded and, thus, a report had to be made to justify public expenditures. Another piece of unneeded literature was added to the paper flood.

A similar public report fulfilling the same need to justify public expenditures is the Report of the Berkeley Parent Education Workshop (140). The paper even has a "report of the coffee and snack breaks committee" presented in all seriousness. The paper, signed by Max Rafferty, Superintendent of Public Instruction, relates nothing about the reactions of participants or what effects the program had on participants.

Berger (15) reports on a continuous parent education group in New York that may lead to a successful voluntary association. The League for Parent Education aims at providing "an orientation and an enriching understanding of parent-child relationships." Other parents and friends help each other in rearing children with no outside institutional aid. Discussion leaders are hired who are professionals from the various fields of social work, psychology, and family life education. In order to provide maximum benefit, in-depth and varied exposure, the leader stays with a group for only two years. Berger senses that the experience of the League can be repeated in any community where there is an awareness of the value of parent education. However, if the awareness doesn't exist, the program would have to be provided by professionals within an institutional setting funded privately or publicly. But Berger believes that rather than follow that approach, professionals should serve as "catalysts to stimulate interest and to encourage people to do the organizing and fund raising necessary to provide the structure."

Religious Education

Churches tend too often to use discussion to serve what they conceive as "their" ends instead of being way-stations giving shelter to people in

their own growth journeys. Two theses that demonstrate the problem are by Peters (119), Role of Small Groups in Christian Adult Education, and Kamitsuka (168), A Conceptual Scheme for an Adaptation of Participation Training in Adult Education for Use in the Three Love Movement in Japan. Peters believes that a study of small groups throughout Christian history from the time of Christ shows that discussion groups should have compatible values and norms with a common purpose or cause. In extrapolating guidelines for successful church-related discussions Peters has only perpetuated a common fault of Western religions: their belief in their exclusiveness and uniqueness. A discussion along Peters' guidelines holds promise of very little dissension and for much organization of action upon certain beliefs (common purpose). Kamitsuka's history of the Three Love Movement almost seems to apologize for the movement's beginnings in unyielding devotion, love, and obedience to the Japanese Emperor. Discussion is a means used within an extremely rigid educational pattern that serves the paternalism of the state structure which sees all Japan as one family. The church's use of discussion may be more considerate of the qualities of human interrelations and of personal growth dynamics, but ultimately faces the same dilemma of a belief structure that is invariably a closed system.

A study done in a church setting by Stevenson comparing residential and non-residential programs concluded that the residential program was best. A somewhat redundant conclusion in the face of the alternatives--community or non-community. An interesting footnote was that as a direct result of the residential discussion participants increased the percentage of personal income that was given to the church by the participants!

Leslie's (90) Sharing Groups in the Church points to some abuses of discussion. The leader is just that, a leader and not a member of the group. In the name of greater interpersonal growth and change, the goals of the church and its appointed agent, the leader, are advocated and served. Leslie has perceived many of the essential needs of participants in discussion. Of all the

discussion writers, he alone states that love is the basis for interrelationships in group sessions. He brings Martin Buber's I-Thou philosophy to the discussion level, but resorts to artificial process terms, i.e., the five stages of "the drama of salvation in the supportive group process: the call, conviction, grace, crucifixion, resurrection." Although Leslie states that it takes community to be human and that discussion groups should typify communities in interaction, his "I-Thou" discussions are constrained by his particular model of a certain religious reality. Participants in growth are limited to that mode of perception.

Education for Aging

Institutional programs dealing with the aged are researched by Mason (98), Mills (105), and Hunter (74). Mason's study demonstrates only that the aged can use opportunities to talk to each other in a non-habitual manner. No observable change took place in behavior patterns, validating the observation of the aged's preoccupation with self, reduced investment in the environment, and lessening of the variety of interaction with others. Hunter's studies indicate that the best that presently designed discussion programs can do for the aged is to prepare them for the reality of the retirement situation. Hunter's research was supported by federal grants and consequently includes much data justifying the money spent. To top it off, a federally funded university report structured by a servant of the institution concludes that the program was more effective with well-educated whites and thus, further study (and more federal money) is needed. (If a highly educated, white, institutional structure devises a program that is self-serving, how can the less advantaged benefit?)

Mills's report concludes that the aged need to learn more about the developmental psychology of aging, improved verbal communication skills, and cultivation of respect for diversity. These needs can be ascertained from any study, for we can always benefit from continuing learning in such areas.

Public Affairs Discussion

Another area of discussion use serving institutional ends is public affairs education. The Ford Foundation spent two million dollars on "packaged" study discussion programs as a framework for "issues" group discussion (22). For a program in economics the goal recommended was that the focus should be on the gross national product, a topic fitting the "average adult concerned about his citizenship responsibilities." That citizenship responsibilities are somehow connected to gross national product is a value judgment. The packaged program worked best in the area of the arts, areas in which the average person does not have a working knowledge but desires to learn something about. In the final report (52) on the Ford Foundation Fund for Adult Education, an aim of discussion is seen as "improving the ability of participants to make independent judgments on critical issues." Whether programmed discussion can lead to independent judgment is problematic. Voicing an opinion based on experience and making an independent judgment based on developed wisdom are two different things.

Freedman and Power, in (51) The Few and the Many, lambast some of the naivete of researchers who talk about spreading public awareness of issues. The fact is that even with universal public education only a few people, one percent according to Power, have a broad and undistorted knowledge of public issues. That being the case, public affairs discussion may lead to more obfuscation as well as possible clarification.

Harp and Cummings found that public affairs discussions attracted more participants in smaller towns than in larger and middle-size cities, although the issues discussed were of far more importance to the larger urban areas. Discussion participants were concerned about means to implement ideas discussed. Harp and Cummings (62) could only lamely conclude that "it would appear that additional information is required as to the legitimate means of initiating social action in a democracy." In questions of this nature, we come down to the nitty-gritty of political power and the possibilities of responsible initiation of political action.

In a study made by Anderson (161) in 1947 of selected Wisconsin adult organizations and public agencies, the point is made that discussion aids the exercise of democratic rights by educating the adult in how to make an intelligent choice in voting. The governmental system is an accepted given and the citizen is only provided information that will enable him to vote with knowledge of why he cast his vote the way he did. By thus manipulating the ends and means of the discussion, leaders can preclude freer inquiry into the nature and composition of the power structure and the system that brought it into being.

Police-community relations discussion experiments are researched by Bell (14) and Lipsitt and Steinbrunner (91). The studies give evidence of the obvious. When the aggrieved community meets with its antagonists within a legal power structure in an atmosphere supportive of human relations growth, police and community decrease the hostility existing between them. However, when we consider practical power plays we find a different story. A community relations project in San Francisco encountered stiff resistance from the police ranks. The police unit involved in the program and the community they worked with were mutually able to lessen tension through human relations understanding. However, the police unit found itself often working at cross purposes with the rest of the force. Forced to become a rubber stamp for police policies, the head of the unit eventually quit. Turner (150) gives a colorful account of this experiment in The Police Establishment.

Other institutional uses of discussion are described by Mills (106), Use of Diagnostic Small Groups in Police Recruit Selection and Training; Zeller (159), A Short-Term Adult Program Experiment in a Correctional Institution; Dollins (35), The Effect of Group Discussion as a Learning Procedure on the Adaptive Social Behavior of Educable Adult Mental Retardates; and Dance (29), Communication Training for Role Transformation, The Preparation of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers for Training Project Staff Roles. The discussion uses in the above cases are narrowly defined to serve a specific

institutional purpose. In one manner or another the discussant is prepared for the acceptance of some type of functioning role in the institutional setting.

Discussion has also been utilized to serve government directly. A draft report (43) on a Leadership Orientation Program stated that a purpose of the program was "to prepare community organization leaders for active participation in determining the future role as well as goals and objectives for the newly established Falls-of-the-Ohio Metropolitan Council of Governments." Each of the twelve sessions, however, was set up with forty-five to sixty minutes for speakers and only forty-five minutes or less for discussion on topics about which participants had little detailed knowledge.

The federal government has adopted discussion as a technique for involving the rural population in civil defense planning. Role playing and success stories of other communities are used in this "public relations" discussion program (42) in order to get across the greater need for civil defense preparedness. Whale's (154) Appraisal of Process of Planning for Total Resource Development in a Wisconsin County relates that there was more dissimilarity than similarity between needs identified by citizens groups and those established by the professionals orienting the groups. The discussion participants were extensions of the professional's pet ideas of what was the best course of development. The professionals thought their special body of knowledge permitted them a greater degree of success in perception, a self attitude that was not shared by the community participants.

When poverty programs were a government fad in the middle and late sixties, several programs with heavy use of discussion were constructed. New York University's Harlem Seminars (103,139) were found to have low visibility because of poor subsidizing. Irregular attendance plagued the experiment, and to remedy this situation, the project coordinators suggested that participants be encouraged to enroll in the entire series and

receive a certificate upon completion. (In other words, the program would work better if it mimicked the local educational form of attendance and supplied a piece of paper, a form that miserably failed to meet the real needs of the underprivileged.)

Project ENABLE sought to reach low income families for family-life education discussion. This program was successful in drawing on the strengths of the people it was attempting to serve. The program had 200 aides recruited from the neighborhoods as well as 138 professionals. But cross-purposes arose between the project's institutional bias and the poverty family's distrust of institutions within "the system." The parents' mistrust was overcome because family care is a universal concern which strikes across class lines. Studies of ENABLE were made by Manser (97), Simulmatics Corporation (40), and Birnbaum (17).

Somewhat similar studies in different social areas are Priester's (122) report of a program reaching low income young homemakers in a rural area, Robert's (126) evaluation of methods in getting a new farm practice adopted, and Edwards and Ring's (37) study of a demonstration project on fertility control. The extraordinary feature of these programs was that their operators went to the participants' homes and farms for personal contact to maintain motivation and awareness. Circular newsletters were also involved in the studies by Robert and Priester, with good success in maintaining awareness. Maintenance of awareness is difficult in Utterback (151), Beckhard (13), Menkin (101,102), and Gutzmer (58).

One interesting work for sake of comparison with American views of discussion in education schemes is the 1966 proceedings of the annual conference of the Australian Association of Adult Education (9). The Australian report states that self-realization depends on the membership of groups. This belief is derived logically from the stated fact that people need each other in order to be themselves.

Use of Discussion Guides

Of value for the beginning student of discussion and those studying contemporary consciousness are discussion guides. Discussion guides are a needed crutch when other concise source materials are scarce, when the time necessary to train leaders in the discussion content is short, or when simple creative imagination in posing questions is of short supply. Pennsylvania State University has a number of high quality discussion guides in public issues, with readings by knowledgeable persons in the field. These guides: Latin America in the Sixties (109); United Nations (116), Modern Political Economy (65), Psychological Problems in the American Family (63), Social Influences Upon Human Behavior (44), and Recent American History 1932-1965 (100) are good for creating issue awareness.

An issue of Intercom (72) was devoted to instructing program planners on how to prepare a world affairs program. A vast amount of information was given in the form of bibliographies of speaker sources, tape and film sources, public agency materials sources, and where to go for public briefings by private and official agencies. Bibliographies of this type are of considerable aid to groups who wish to self-initiate and construct their own program. The New Jersey Community Action Training Institute put together a catalogue (117) of training materials that can serve the same purpose. Ellison's bibliography (38) of materials designed for adult discussion use provides quite a variety in choice of topic areas.

Young's book (158), The Mystery of Matter, is evidence of originality in concept. Instead of studying and discussing the present state of scientific knowledge, the reader is led through the growth of a scientific concept from its historical beginnings to its present application. Insights are gained into the conditions of growth. By emphasizing the growth and developmental process, basic issues are raised that stimulate thought and discussion.

We hope more discussion manuals will reflect the growing realization that our present state of affairs in any area is the result of the dynamics of the growth process within a group. The most current writings (e.g., Bormann, Paterson) on discussion have already begun to recognize what discussion should be in relation to man's ultimate end of self-realization and transcendence. We venture the opinion that discussion literature may move further in this direction.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND THE MASS MEDIA

In recent years, as technology has broadened rapidly in scope, complexity, and range, it is understandable that adult educators have sought ways of linking it with discussion. Discussion has been connected with print media, computers, phonograph records, tapes, films, and slides. But perhaps the most seductive possibilities have been in regard to radio and television because of their ability to reach large numbers of people over great spaces at the same time.

The development has been called by various names but perhaps the most common is "listening group." Ohliger has attempted this definition (176):

> When a group of adults meets together on a regular basis to discuss radio or television programs for educational purposes, this activity is known as a listening group. It is usually conducted under the leadership of a lay person, sometimes with the assistance of supplemental printed materials and with arrangements for two-way communication [feedback] between the listeners and the broadcasters.

Ohliger's dissertation (110) and a condensation published in 1967 (111) chronicled the history of the listening group throughout the world since its first application in England through the BBC in the early 1920's. A recent article of his brings the history up to 1971 (176).

Perhaps the most significant finding in these histories is that listening groups can attract more clientele of lower economic and educational attainment than can most adult education programs. But Ohliger's work fails to come to grips with the manipulative potential in the organization of such groups. In a time of declining legitimacy of the standard educational

institutions this potential will be very attractive to those who would pursue, consciously or unconsciously, the goal of controlling the lives of others by turning the whole world into a school with the aid of media technology. There are already signs that this is happening.

International Uses of Mass Media and Discussion

The problems and potential here are most evident at present in countries outside the United States, especially in the so-called "underdeveloped countries." Internationally, leaders of institutions are discovering that mass-media programs with discussion follow-up constitute an effective means of imparting information, changing attitudes and behaviors. That group listening and discussion is effective is demonstrated by projects in the "underdeveloped countries" which have been researched by Ohliger (110), Jain (169), Sitaram (170), and Inquai (79). Group listening and discussion have also been tried in government programs pushing literacy education (42). The radio has been an aid in enabling "underdeveloped countries" to popularize planning programs and make efficient use of limited communication resources. In the Phillipines the radio-discussion program format has been adopted for adult education in citizenship, personal and environmental health, parent education, and education for a better livelihood.

With the spreading use of television, discussion programs have arisen using this medium for its obvious visual advantage. A UNESCO-Senegal project (48) found that educational television, which to be effective requires discussion groups, heightened awareness of social problems and as a result might be an important factor in national development. Because of the cost differential between radio and television communication systems, radio may be the predominant mass media tool in the "underdeveloped countries."

The problem of the manipulative potential of listening groups in "underdeveloped countries"

is best treated within the context of the overall use of communications technology in adult education in those countries. See, for example, the series of exchanges still continuing between Henry Cassirer and David Gueulette in the pages of Mass Media/Adult Education, the newsletter of the Mass Media Section of the Adult Education Association of the U.S.A. Other writers are joining in this exchange and the basic papers (177,178) have been published as literature reviews by ERIC/AE.

Cassirer, who in his many years with UNESCO as Director of the Division of the Use of Mass Media in Out-of-School Education was undoubtedly the single person most responsible for spreading listening groups in these countries, writes (177):

> In face of the recent population growth and technological development, a UNESCO publication entitled The New Media: Memo to Educational Planners concluded, 'Many more people have to be educated for a continually increasing span of their lives so that they may absorb an ever-expanding and changing body of knowledge.' To cope with the exigencies of this revolutionary situation arising from the need to educate adults in a constantly changing society, it has become essential to find new methods and make use of mass media for this purpose. The considerable strides made in recent years in the press, radio, film and television world have provided increased opportunities for the utilization of these media in various aspects of education, i.e., out-of-school education, literacy, rural development and family planning. At UNESCO, a division of the Department of Mass Communication is specifically responsible for the investigation and the implementation of these possibilities in Member States.

But Gueulette, who has traveled, lived, and worked in these countries, comments (178):

> UNESCO has contributed much to the general approach to the utilization of mass media in Third World nations and consequently has no

> doubt established the pervasive dogmatic attitude toward bringing to these countries highly technical, mostly unnecessary, schemes for schooling. Beside many efforts to industrialize and mechanize the educational processes of developing lands, UNESCO has been energetic in the publishing and distribution of the 'always successful programs' and imploring other organizations to follow their lead. UNESCO's New Educational Media in Action: Case Studies for Planners [ed. note: the publication Cassirer referred to is the summary volume in this series] is typical of the sort of material that it prints. It is full of cases in which new media are used for the improvement of the educational process. It soft sells to the readers the various paraphernalia that could be employed to mechanize schools in almost any country. It reminds me of several advertisements I saw last year that tried to sell weapons systems to small nations. From small arms to jet fighters, we have what is just right for you. UNESCO publications are full of such advertisements to the developing nations naturally under the guise of respectable research projects. The general omission of an hypothesis and the inclusion of insufferable amounts of irrelevant data indicate, to my satisfaction, that the project results are nothing but window dressing to market modern technical gadgetry.

Mass Media and Community Education

Governmental agencies and educational television stations have been interested in the uses of TV and radio as a means of community education directed toward social change. Projects in Canada have been studied by Mackie (94), and Sim (137). Groombridge (57) has edited at UNESCO a comparative study of ETV in Canada, Czechoslovokia and Japan.

Starr (142) and Johnson (82) researched TV experiments in Massachusetts and St. Louis. Starr's study of the Massachusetts experiment

reveals the difficulties entailed when putting together programs that touch upon sensitive concerns of power complexes, e.g., mayor vs. police commissioner. The U.S. University Council on Education for Public Responsibility initiated a television series program in 1964 on modern urban life that had the ambitious aim of stimulating the formation of nationwide discussion groups. Results were spotty, but indicated the most widespread use ever of local panels for a nationally produced film series shown in eighty U.S. and Canadian cities. Miller (104) gives a colorful account of this venture by national educational television.

A Recent Scientific Approach

One view that derives from scientific thinking has bearing here. It is just coming to the fore and starts with the assumption that mass media produce a highly efficient use of human energy in creating awareness. According to this approach, when audio-visual presentations are followed by discussion, participants have an even wider base to operate from as a result of the increased array of evoked emotional and intellectual responses. The human perception input system is heavily favored toward sight, not hearing. Verbal communication is a most inefficient use of energy. Writing is a worse use of energy, but the printed word can be distributed in small quantities cheaper than any other method.

Sources for this view include a study by Tribus and McIrvine on "Energy and Information" in Scientific American (149). In it the authors find that verbal telephone conversation for one minute involves .008 joules (energy units) per bit of information. One minute of a radio broadcast involves .0006 joules per bit. The projection of one 35 mm. slide for one minute takes .02 joules per bit; one television frame takes .00002 joules per bit. Add to these items the fact that "the number of neurons connected with vision is much greater than with any of the other senses, and that it is estimated that as much as 25 percent of the total energy expended by the brain goes toward the upkeep of our visual apparatus" (36). The conclusion could be that the human intellectualization

process generally is much more efficient when stimulated by sight than by hearing. More information can thus be assimilated for the amount of mental energy we have to process information.

In this view human brains are best equipped to assimilate visual images, not verbal symbols, such as words. However, general practical knowledge of receiving and sending mechanisms does not yet exist which would enable us to communicate visually strictly via electromagnetic brain waves, i.e., through telepathy. For interpersonal communication we habitually use words as the ordinary means. It would follow therefore, that educational methods which use discussion for learning should re-orient toward audio-visuals and use discussion strictly as a means of interpersonal reaction and growth.

The Focal Point for the Coming Struggle

To conclude this chapter it might be well to alert readers to the possibility that the dispute over the control of the juncture between mass media and discussion may well be the focus in what we see as the coming struggle over which view of man will prevail. Such radical educational critics as Illich (77) and Reimer (125) call for the acceptance of technology in society, but want to put the control of that technology as much as possible into the hands of individuals at the point of use. This could mean, for example, that participants in discussion groups joining together without social pressure, could go a long way toward controlling the output, and even the characteristics, of media technology. Others, such as Allen in The Electric Humanities, appear to take a different view (31):

> Ours is indeed a time of revolution--as are all times. Change is the constant. Only by accepting change and learning to live with it can we hope to prevail. It is time to teach the present and the future as well as the past. It is time to start building

> the classroom without walls. . . . Now is the time to teach the total environment.

If the reader takes only one judgment away from studying this monograph, it is hoped he will conclude that the juncture of mass media and discussion bears close watching and careful control if the spirit of man is to survive.

CHAPTER VI

PITFALLS TO AVOID

The Threat of Mechanistic Values

Group discussion, in becoming task-oriented, loses view of humanity, a view which should be uppermost. Which is more important: task or person? Dalkey (28), of the Rand Corporation, has written a study of group opinion in task-oriented discussion: The Delphi Method. The purpose of the study was to improve procedures for formulating group judgment, decision-making, and policy formulation. Dalkey has been able to mathematically plot out various variables in relation to the number of participants and degree of error in group judgment. Dalkey believes that the method can deal with any wide range of problems, from long-term threat assessment to technological forecasts and evaluation of degrees of social development. His method reflects the view of the individual as a flesh and blood computer. Man's major value would appear to be as a fact-machine with varying degrees of expertness. . . . Judgment, wisdom, and insight are "flattering names for kinds of opinions." Dalkey writes that "wisdom is opinion with charisma . . . value judgments are factual statements of an especially complex, vague, and in general much more speculative sort than the usual descriptive inputs to decision situations." Are these the discussion conditions that led the government to perceive the "reality" of its war policy for Vietnam?

Man is wrapped up in his power to manipulate consciousness and to socially engineer what the individual man is to Be. Skinner (163) and his Beyond Freedom and Dignity is becoming popular by no mere accident. By more efficiently engineering our physical state of being man cannot only go beyond freedom but deny it altogether.

Too much of group discussion literature operates on thought modes that are inconsistent with modern needs. Margaret Mead states in a

working paper for a Michigan State University Workshop (88):

> The whole teaching and learning continuum once tied in an orderly and productive way to the passing of generations and the growth of the child into a man has exploded in our faces. Yet even as we try to catch hold and patch up the pieces, we fail to recognize what has happened.

For an illustration of the application of the time-honored assumptions of discussion one should read The Discussion Method in Teaching: A Symposium (64). The book is filled with the very concepts that have caused events to explode in our faces. Buchler writes that "since certain aims and values in a college are of greater importance than others. . . such aims and values are what any discussion ought to subserve." The concept of any discussion subserving any preordained value structure subverts the dignity and uniqueness of the discussants. Buchler further comments that "the view that no aims whatever can be specified as guides . . . questions the very existence of organization in learning."

Nothing in human activity is unorganized; a time, a place, a reason exists for everything. Only prior conditioning makes us incapable of seeing relationships in seemingly unconnected ideas, events, or concepts. Open-ended organization can exist and co-exist with order, as long as we are concerned with growth at the human level. Human growth is not necessarily consistent with the growing application of technological and other mechanistic concepts. The mind is a means in our growth as human beings; products of the mind and their development should not be ends in themselves.

One researcher who put discussion factors in perspective was Jacobson (160) in a thesis done at the University of Washington in 1968: "Social Power in Group Discussion Literature." Every conceivable factor in group discussion was named, categorized, and graded. He made no pretense at knowing how to use or manage all the factors he

found; they simply were there. Still other "social chemists" might choose to manipulate these factors in ways that deprive people of their right to be free agents of their activity. A seemingly "neutral" research study might thus be used for purposes not originally contemplated.

The theorists on discussion abstract purposes and natures of discussion that have no relation to the reality situation. Warren (152), for example, in A Treasury of Techniques for Teaching Adults, states that discussion is a means "to progress from the known toward the unknown by various processes of deductive reasoning." This statement is a variant of the belief of some philosophers that use of logic leads to new knowledge. Logic clarifies a subject in depth but does not necessarily add to our body of knowledge. To say that discussion internally entails a process of deductive reasoning is very debatable when the various directions discussion can take are considered as a result of indirect and parallel mental associations which are not deductive but intuitive.

Demonstrating the Validity of Self-Evident Observations

There are various types of discussion groups, depending on the discipline, human endeavor, or group. In discussion people learn how to communicate grievances, insights, personal experiences of enlightenment, and pieces of wisdom. A commonsense observation will suffice to demonstrate the above. Yet the amount of literature that devotes itself to demonstrating the validity of self-evident observations is amazing.

One of the findings in a thesis by Heckman (66) on the "Effect of the Y-Indian Guide Movement and Group Discussion On the Attitudes that Participating Fathers Hold Toward Their Sons" was that the discussion program did not significantly affect the parental attitudes of the participating fathers. One questions whether discussion alone is going to alter significantly the nature of the father-son relationship when the discussion group consists solely of the fathers. Yet an entire research

thesis, with the energy and time that went into writing it, was wasted on proving scientifically the validity of a self-evident factor of the nature of a parent. Interestingly, the researcher concluded that the fathers needed further discussion sessions of a re-organized nature to educate them in proper attitudes of parenthood!

Educational Chauvinism

The theorists in the University of Chicago Discussion Symposium (175) only pay lip service to discussants as "completely rounded personalities," but they actually continue to espouse discussion as a tool of scientific, efficient, logical analysis promoting what they believe to be authentic liberal education.

In a book on teaching adults (121) Brown continues this educational "chauvinism." He believes that "discussion is good if it achieves its particular end. . . . If there is no one particular end, a discussion is good if it achieves something of educational value."

Training Methodology. Part 3 (148) from the National Communicable Disease Center has a discussion bibliography that is of note for the emphasis that it places on "objective" methods of communication and analysis. Bass's analysis of leaderless group discussion is criticized because "little has been done to evaluate the technique quantitatively or to investigate the possibility of making objective measures of individuals in this situation." In a chapter on discussion in Educational Tools for Health Personnel, Wilbur (156) tells health workers that discussion is a good means to change attitudes, habits, and behavior of individuals, and to communicate information. Discussion for the health worker is a short cut and an extension of traditional methods of health education. The self-image of the professional is that of the most knowing, benevolent public servant. People generally resent the condescending attitude and this resentment prevents effective communication among equals, which in theory we are supposed to be.

Bergevin and McKinley (16) pinpoint one old assumption of discussion in Participation Training: "Most people, when they are involved in learning experiences, don't think as much about people as they do about subjects." The writers recognize that a number of participants have "an image of education as receiving information or answers from somebody else." This image further illustrates what we have mentioned about our institutional and social structures inculcating certain expectations and values that do not permit a supportive atmosphere of self-initiation.

Intellectual Elitism

Another book that applies contemporary thinking on uses of discussion is Ottaway's Learning Through Group Experience (114). The book is an account of a long-term experiment in small group discussion that employed a method similar to the T-group. Ottaway makes deductions from his observations of the discussion group experiment that other theorists have not bothered to consider. He squarely faces the problem of self-realization vs. acceptance of authority. For him "personality grows best under an authority which can gradually be withdrawn. . . . The best leader, like the best teacher, is one who works in such a way as to make his presence unnecessary." Interestingly enough, Ottaway believes that the only way of learning what happens in a group is by participating in a group. This view correlates with that of the Eastern yogis: the way of self-liberation is not found in a book.

Following a long series of group sessions Ottaway notes:

> Finally we begin to piece together the different aspects of ourselves. We find an actual self, still capable of development. We become more conscious of the ideal self towards which we are striving, and more aware of a hidden and primitive self which still needs to be kept under control. We have detected and exposed a false self, attempting to live an existence in fantasy and unreality. We have seen two extremes

to which a man may be driven, but found no cause for despair when we have sensed the creative powers, and the wish to love and receive love, which are beneath all our strivings.

Ottaway, however, believes that group discussion work of intensive nature requires discussants of better than average intelligence. He assumes that "insight" requires superior intelligence and that persons with little education and limited powers of expression would not do well. Ottaway is guilty of intellectual elitism in believing that only persons of better than average qualities can do intensive group discussion work creditably.

In Kaplan (84), Study Discussion in the Liberal Arts, experiments reported involved a somewhat varied sampling of people, the majority of whom had a university degree. Concern was not so much directed toward greater self-awareness as toward an increased amount of intellectual stimulation both through contact with other seekers of stimulation and the very stimulating effect of highly charged interchanges of information. Kaplan's criteria for a good discussion must be viewed in light of the fact that most of the people involved in the discussion program were also involved in other community, intellectual, or social action programs. These people were already expressing their search for a ground of being in other ways. The discussion method was perceived as one method among a multitude of ways of learning about the self and the world. The participants exhibited a quality--the desire to know--that is an important ingredient of any successful discussion. Desire is an emotion that calls the motivation mechanism into action. Motivation to know induces exploration and experimentation with the various ways of knowing. And, sooner or later, the person learns that knowing is not enough; a desire for the growth of the inner capacity of being arises.

Hill (69) has done a Comparative Study of Lecture and Discussion Methods which exhibits a problem similar to that of Kaplan's study: dealing only with professional and highly educated groups.

Hill acknowledges that liberal adult education programs such as the Great Books, Ways of Mankind, or the Liberal Arts Program of the University of California do not attract a cross-section of people. Not only are the participants professional and educated but economically established as well. Hill asks why existing adult education programs "fail to attract the 'blue-collar' worker, the individual with only a grammar school education or the economically marginal individual." If these programs "attract participants who are for the most part highly educated, successful and mature, can these programs be realistically expected to have major effects on the values, attitudes, and behavior of these participants"? Hill, in asking this question, doesn't admit the consequent redundancy of his own findings in the discussion-lecture comparison experiments--participation in discussion did not result in attitude changes significantly greater than those occurring from lectures and neither method had much effect on the mean attitudes of groups.

Parker (115) found in his study on need-affiliation and information-seeking that perceived information needs are low among the less educated. Discussion programs aimed at the less advantaged are going to face a difficult but not insurmountable problem in creating awareness. The poor and the oppressed do not model themselves on the white man's or ruling class's value structure or needs and do not follow the same reaction pattern to the possibility of need-fulfillment.

Training as Manipulation

So-called "training programs" are the most manipulative in their use of discussion. In an introduction to a book on the use of small groups in training (56), Coplin anticipates a "distinct contribution to the engineering of social change." He states that "resistance to change is a 'built in' social defense system maintained by unconscious collusions." For Coplin, discussion methods should deal with the "pathology" in group behavior. This view is reflected in his belief that the service social workers give to their "clients" is improved

by awareness of how "people in families use each other to deal with undesired aspects of themselves." (Emphasis ours.) This is Coplin's view of humanity.

A study by Thelen, Hawkes and Strattner (146) on Role Perception and Task Performance of Experimentally Composed Small Groups is laden with statistical data interrelating discussion variables regarding the group and the participant. We worry about the ultimate use of statistical studies when a statement is made that "it is not impossible that the day will come when measurement procedures will make it as easy to assess pertinent individual traits as to collect the superficial background data which is characteristic of most conferences." So we will be categorized, labeled, and quanticized for whatever use program designers dream up.

In an exposition of his CRAMP systems approach to training, Belbin (93) states that the subject of attitude formation "is important for training as a means of modifying traits, with reference especially to appreciation classes and induction training." Participation in group situations is a means for the organizing agent to subtly manipulate the discussant toward change that may be undesirable to the discussant.

An issue of American Behavioral Scientist (68) was devoted to various articles edited by Fawcett Hill that were concerned with training non-professionals for group therapy. Group discussion work is a major part of the training program. The professionals running the program believe that the discussion method must be highly structured. For sake of exposition the steps in their group cognitive map are (68):

1) Definition of terms and concepts
2) General statement of author's message (assigned reading)
3) Identification of major themes or sub-topics
4) Allocation of time
5) Discussion of major themes and sub-topics
6) Integration of material
7) Application of material

8) Evaluation of author's presentation
9) Evaluation of group and individual performance.

The group process is seen as a "highly technical subject." Highly structured discussion imposed by an outside agent serves only the agent's purpose, which in this case is the protection and maintenance of the professional role in society. Rigid discussion structuring defeats its own purpose in training for group therapy. The structuring syndrome has its own built-in blinders, rendering participants unable to devise methods of interaction which could be more revealing of the topic under consideration.

Dayal (30) reports on a program of organizational development in India and the need for group development within the organizational structure. Individual problems of identity and the importance of individuals and groups evolving a norm of self-consciousness about growth processes were deemed crucial for future organizational growth.

The American concern for maximum efficiency and most production for the dollar is reflected in a Navy experiment researched by Johnson (83) comparing the lecture-discussion method and programmed instruction. To cover the same instructional material 14.5 hours were needed with programmed booklets, while thirty hours were required with lecture-discussion in the course. Logic would thus seem to dictate to a certain type of mind that our educational system be reoriented in this direction. Programming imparts information, however, but does not deal with vital human elements of knowledge, experience, and wisdom. Programmed instruction can teach the logical steps of deductive reasoning, but it cannot teach the human expression of the creative free spirit.

The Tyranny of Numbers

Measurement is a quality that is impartial, yet numbers can be manipulated to demonstrate the validity of almost anything one wishes to believe. Statistical research can serve, in this sense, as

self-fulfilling prophecy. If a theory fits the statistics we believe the theory is right, not that the statistics may indicate something beyond themselves. If statistics fit the theory, we sit satisfied that we are right. Only now are we learning from the area of physics that exceptions to the rule may be the rule.

Discussion research is becoming very enamored of statistics to verify hypotheses concerning group dynamics. Roby (128) has done about the finest empirical study of variables in small group performance, a prototype in its field. But its potential for the growth of human wisdom is questionable. Roby does not intend his work to be a study in techniques of operation research and engineering or applied psychology, but other less ethical scientists may seize upon such works to advance their own man-destroying schemes that serve non-human creations.

CHAPTER VII

THE PRECIPICE OF INFINITY

In group discussion people communicate individual views of reality. If discussants are talking about aspects of a common reality, why is it that disagreement arises? Study of semantics supplies a partial answer, but even when definitions are accepted, discussants will disagree on views of the commonly-defined reality. What needs to be defined and questioned is the term "reality." A more suitable use of the word to resolve misunderstanding is to talk of realities. Yet when we admit to the coexistence of multiple realities, we sometimes come to face creation with fear and trembling because we stand on the precipice of infinity.

In a little known book, Foundations of Empiricism (45), Feibleman develops profound implications for philosophy in his exposition of multiple ontologies and epistemologies. In the last several thousand years philosophers and religious thinkers have devised enough systems so that we can now categorize them in a logical manner by their characteristics. With multiple reality systems, "reality" becomes an ambiguous term, almost useless. The mathematical concepts of relativity in physics can be applied to the relationship among reality systems. Both physics and philosophy ultimately deal with the same subject matter, the force of infinity. The works of Teilhard de Chardin, Human Energy (144) and Activation of Energy (145), slowly develop a dynamic conceptual scheme of man's increasingly complex growth that is drawn toward the "stargate" into infinity.

Growth of self is a natural instinct of man. To stop growing is to begin to die. But growth toward and onward through self-realization is a perilous journey, a journey many people are afraid to take. These fearful people develop closed selves and feel threatened by the outside world instead of relearning facts about themselves

enabling them to partake in the continuing creation of this world with their fellows. Instead of fearing the world and our fellows we must try to become more loving persons, open to all experience and suggestions, thereby perceiving the world and creation critically but with wonderment and awe.

Toward Affective and Intellectual Self-Actualization

Earlier, we touched briefly on Carl Rogers' discussion approach to aid human growth and, to borrow a term from Maslow, self-actualization. Rogers' approach, however, is heavily centered on emotional factors as a counterbalance to the gross manipulative abuses of the intellectual approach in discussion. A middle ground that uses both affective and intellectual factors in self-actualization has not been developed. We would like to put forth a few ideas toward such a development.

Limitations of self are also limitations of consciousness, but both are capable of growth. Consciousness works hand in hand with self. The desire to grow as a human being parallels a desire to know the universe. The desire to know and experience the wonderment of discovery is intrinsically human. Openness to experience opens one to new mental patterns. These new patterns are assimilated into our mental storehouse of impressions. Our mind is continually functioning in making a working reality model of all the information we have assimilated.

Openness to all experience means openness to all the varied disciplines of man's exploratory endeavors. To prevent a narrowness of vision we should develop the ability of random associative thinking, or "lateral thinking" as De Bono terms it in New Think (31, 32). The synthesis into a conceptual scheme of two or more seemingly unrelated ideas or concepts can lead one into exploration of new possibilities of reality models. For example, fairly recently astronomers discovered the existence of gravitational points, "black holes," in which gravitational collapse is a force great enough to

convert matter into pure energy that "escapes." Other astronomers have theorized that the quasars are "white holes"; points which radio astronomy has found to be unbelievably powerful transmitters of energy for such a small mass. Astronomers now propose the real possibility that our universe is interacting with other universes in the exchange of energy. The possibility is mind-boggling to say the least. The mystics have often repeated that man is a microcosm of the universe. And as universes interact and exchange energy, so too do people interact and exchange energy. In the discovery of the universes we rediscover ourselves.

Each individual has his own particular mastery that contributes to overall understanding, the mental field of interpersonal communication. Each particle of individual enlightenment passed on to another individual becomes a possible catalyst for insights unique to that person. Groups of individuals who can interact at the level of insights and enlightenment are able to piece together reality models that become the synergistic basis for further action and enlightenment. However, groups interacting at that level must in order to be successful exhibit feelings of love, understanding, and acceptance.

An Ideal Discussion Group?

A discussion group modeled on these views ideally should include people of as diverse talents and knowledge as possible. In the midst of increasingly specialized disciplines, to make any sense of the complex body of knowledge, the various disciplines must be interrelated and interacting. Increasing specialization (unending fragmentation) is a guarantee of eventual obsolesence.

Species survival is also involved, as Leakey, the anthropologist, has warned. Man has so overdeveloped his cerebral activities relative to his total nature that he stands a real chance of extinction as a species. Discussion groups limited to like-minded persons with parochial visions are contrary to the instinct to grow and to be. Our saving grace is diversity, with creative dynamic

interchange among the separate parts. The uniqueness of individualities in touch with one another causes a delicate tension that is a source of energy which stimulates interchange.

Ideally a discussion group should be a working group that either lives communally or meets together often over an extended period of time. Numerous discussion researchers have noted that the longer a group works together the better the results of the discussion. In a real sense a discussion group should develop a sense of community. By becoming more interdependent the individual members become less egocentric.

When a person is less egocentric, thinking less about his own ideas, opinions, and concerns, he is more understanding of the people around him. Only by breaking down ego barriers can we communicate on the level of Being. Egocentrism is a blinder to Being and, consequently, an impediment to self-actualization. However, one should not make the common mistake of assuming the posture of false humility and ego denigration. Nor can one rigorously pursue the path of self-actualization if he does not have a strong identity. Dr. Krippner, of the New York Maimonides Dream Laboratory, has noted (Rolling Stone [26]) that a strong ego is characteristic of the self-actualizer. One must have a strong mature ego in order to transcend it. To do otherwise is to invite psychological disorders.

Admittedly, we have been describing characteristics of discussion in an ideal state that is rarely met. But we construct ideals to give direction to the workings of the human spirit. Anyone can partake in consciousness-growth discussion as long as his human creative spirit is open. Even in the most oppressive atmosphere, man's creative spirit will stir him to enact his vision. At Auschwitz, inmates carved figurines out of hard black bread. Anyone can create reality models that give new meaning to the environment, whether he is a hustler, hippie, prostitute, bookie, gambler, show singer, cabbie, salesman, gas station attendant, or policeman. All these varied people have learned and assimilated from experience within their life

styles, characteristics of human nature that can be communicated to each other and synergistically synthesized into a model of man if they could drop their role postures long enough in a group discussion.

The least that can be expected of anyone in any group discussion is an attempt at dropping the posturing of roles. The teacher is not a teacher; he is another human being who requires security, warmth, and love from his fellows like anyone else. Talk of multiple roles a person plays is dehumanizing. We are total human beings called upon by life to work with our optimum abilities. Man is not a composite of roles that can be manipulated like so many chess pieces. Life gives us many chances to transcend ourselves but too many people choose to spend it playing out games. Discussion as dialogue is an approach that can be used to set aside or transcend games and role playing, to humanize interactions and living patterns. To become more fully human is a not often practiced art.

Is Life Itself at Stake?

The state of planetary affairs has reached a point where the necessity of survival demands that we ask not only "What are we"? but also "Where are we going"? Many among us have a growing realization that humanity has reached a stage of self-consciousness where its future can be determined with conscious intent. Our future holds two diametrically opposed choices: to grant each individual the freedom and means to realize his Self in a spirit of creative love, or to attempt to manipulate every single known aspect of creation for the selfish gain of a few, controlling consciousness in the process. Men and women with many interests, including especially group discussion, must seriously and jointly analyze the direction of development in their particular areas.

We cry out for a connection between the individual and other individuals in the collective mode known as the institution that is honorable, not degrading: healthy, not diseased; human, not mechanistic. Is there any other answer but to

decrease the power of the institution in order to increase each individual's capacity and to remove constraints on his potential for growth? At the same time, the ability of individuals to interact with each other outside of any institution and the power of each individual to stand by himself outside the stream of others must receive greater and more meaningful recognition. We are aware of the paradox--Who is to provide the recognition? But all of us must live and act within the dynamic tension of this paradox!

There lies our hope and our common danger. Is it any wonder that in these times of the massive growth of institutional power we conclude--Life itself is at stake?

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